

1 Peter 2:4-12 (NIV)

As you come to him, the living Stone – rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him – ⁵ you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ For in Scripture it says:

⁷ “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.”

⁸ Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe,

“The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,”

⁹ and, “A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.”

They stumble because they disobey the message – which is also what they were destined for.

¹⁰ But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹¹ Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

¹² Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. ¹³ Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

We’re in the book of First Peter today, if you’d care to turn there with me. First Peter, chapter two.

Last Sunday, up here at Children’s Time, I talked with the kids about the word *glorious*, and about how, even though it’s not heard much these days, it’s significant because it speaks of the things of God.

Glorious is a superlative – like *majestic*, *superb*, *magnificent* and *outstanding*. Words like that speak of the highest order, and because of that, they all, ultimately, refer back to God, to the divine.

Maybe we hear all those words less and less in our day because we hear less and less about God in our day.

Regardless, we have been speaking in glorious terms these last couple Sundays.

Two weeks ago, we talked about the *glorious gift* of prayer: the extraordinary ability we have to communicate with God, made possible for us by the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Last Sunday, we talked about the *glorious world* that is God’s vision for His creation: the restoration of all that sin has broken here, available to whosoever will receive God’s offer of redemption, again made possible by Jesus.

God’s vision of a glorious world is why *we*, as a church family, want to *be, ourselves*, and to *see around us* a community that reflects Jesus’ vision and values. That’s how we express God’s *vision* for His world.

Today, we look at God’s *mission* for His Church, which is also glorious.

Now, just to define terms a little: if *vision* is where God is *going* with His world, then *mission* is how we *get* there.

If *vision* is the *destination*, then *mission* is the *vehicle*.

So, if *vision* is a restored world, a community that reflects Jesus’ vision and values, how do we achieve that?

That’s *mission*. *God’s* mission, and God has a clear mission in mind. And you know, the *remarkable* thing, the *glorious* thing, about it is: *we are involved!*

God’s Church around the world, including us and all who follow Jesus: *we’re* involved; we’re His *tools*, His *instruments* in working it out.

And it’s all because of *who Jesus has made us to be*.

Who we are in Christ is the main thing the apostle Peter is talking about here, and you know, just to read it – to read about who Jesus has made us to be, it’s nearly unbelievable that we could actually be what God says we are and do what God says we’ll do.

It really can be hard to believe our identity, as God declares it.

It’s like when Annette and I had our first son.

Right there in that hospital room, suddenly, by declaration of the doctor (and of course the appearance of Benjamin) we were parents.

But we didn’t *feel* like we were parents. We didn’t think we were equipped to be or ready to be.

But we *were*, just the same.

A similar thing happened when I was appointed pastor here. The bishop said I was. The declaration was made, and so I *was*, in fact. But in *feeling*, I would have never said that I was prepared to be.

Well, the same is true with God’s Church. Whether or not we think we are or we’re ready to be, God says that *we are!* Well, just look there at what Peter says.

Many of these phrases here come from Isaiah and the Psalms, but some think because of how they’re arranged here that Peter took them from a song – a hymn that the early church sang – to present in a lyrical sort of form what he wanted to say, first about Jesus and then about those who follow Him.

Now, about Jesus: all of this here about the *cornerstone* of faith becoming the *capstone* of God’s plan and yet still being a *stumbling stone* to those who will not believe, all of that describes both who Jesus *is and* also Jesus’ *role* in God’s mission of redemption.

Those who reject Jesus, then, work *against* God’s vision of restoration; they work *against* God’s vision of a *glorious world*.

But, Peter says there in verse 9 that those – like us, His church – who *receive* Jesus: we are different.

Peter says because we embrace Jesus, we are, well, Peter calls us six things—six names here. We've all been called names at some time or another in our lives, but we've never been called names as good as these.

Peter says that all those in Jesus are (verse 6): a *chosen people*; a *royal priesthood*, a *holy nation*, and *God's special possession*.

And on down in verse 10, Peter goes on. He says we are *the people of God*, and also a *people who have received mercy*.

Now, each of these descriptions of the Church—of Christ followers—is worthy of its own explanation, but our point today is *the mission of this body*.

You see, because in Christ we, His followers, are all these things, God has entrusted to us this *mission*, which Peter describes in verse 9 as *declaring the praises of Him who called us out of darkness and into His light*.

Our function as Christ followers, you see, arises directly from our identity.

Since we are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation and all the rest—since we are God's redeemed people, we are then, both individually and corporately, to declare to the rest of the world the praise of Him who redeemed us.

Our response to enjoying, *ourselves*, God's vision of *redemption* and *restoration*, is to spread the word of God's vision so the rest of the world might enjoy it too.

That is God's glorious mission, which becomes our glorious message to share with the world around us. And that just makes sense, doesn't it?

Think of it this way: imagine that on your way into church today someone was standing at the door giving out \$100.00 bills. Just walking into the sanctuary, the guy hands you the hundred and says, "Here, this is for you! I'll be here for several days, and I have lots more to give out; I want to give one to everyone I can!"

You're skeptical, but then he pulls out this huge stack of bills and says, "No really, tell your friends!"

Now, if that happened to any of us, what would we do?

We would tell everyone we know, wouldn't we?

We would tell everyone we know. We would post it everywhere we could: "Hey, there's a guy giving out hundred-dollar bills at the Free Methodist Church in Wilmore."

And most of our friends would say, "No way!"

But then we'd pull the bill out and say, "Yes, here's the one he gave me!" or we'd show them the picture that we took of his stack of hundreds.

Is that not what we'd do?

Of course, it is. We'd do all we could to convince our friends to come and get their hundred dollars.

So, isn't Jesus worth more to us than \$100?

Isn't a relationship with our Creator— isn't eternal life— worth more than \$100?

And don't our unsaved friends need Jesus more than they need \$100?

We know they do. Their eternal destiny depends on what they do with Jesus.

We know that, so let's face it: the only reason we don't speak more boldly than we do about Jesus is because we're afraid of how those around us might respond to us.

We're afraid of their opinion of us.

We're afraid that they think they need \$100 more than they need Jesus.

But are those good enough reasons for us to say nothing?

Will *those around us* say they were good enough reasons when the day comes that they face Jesus and realize we did not say to them what we should have said about Him?

When they look at us and say, "You'd tell me about \$100, but you didn't tell me about Jesus?"

You see, one day, sooner or later, everyone will know how important Jesus is. But we have the information early—the news about forgiveness and restoration. It's a glorious message, and God says it's ours to share!

And if our friends don't believe our *words*, then God intends that we *show* them the truth of our words with the integrity of our *lives*—with the way He's changed, and continues to change, us.

That's how God wants us to share in His mission. He wants us to embrace all that Peter says here about us because we *are* in Jesus.

We are a chosen people,
a royal priesthood,
a holy nation,
God's special possession,
the people of God, and,
the receivers of His mercy.

God wants us to realize that this is who we are in Jesus. And then He wants us to make it known that this is available to anyone whosoever will follow Jesus.

That is God's *glorious message*. Speaking and living it is our *mission*, and it is the way to *God's vision* of a redeemed world—a community that reflects Jesus' vision and values.

Now, here in our church, we have put this mission into these words—we've said it like this: *our church will faithfully offer to our neighbors, near and far, the word of God, the love of the Father, the grace of the Son, and the power of the Holy Spirit*.

This is just our way of describing the vehicle to God's vision—the future God wants to see.

Let me unpack this just a little bit.

The first words: *our church*. That is all of us, right?.

This building is not "the church."

The pastors are not "the church."

The staff, the leaders, teachers: they are not "the church."

We are the church, you and me. All here who have received Jesus, all here who are following Jesus: we are "the church."

So, when any of us says, "You know, I think *the church* should," or, "*the church* needs to," or, "*the church* will," then we're talking about us.

We are the church.

Our church will faithfully offer...

We are a people called to *offer* the truth that we've come to know and embrace about Jesus.

We *offer* it to those around us, which means we do not *insist or argue or threaten or beat into* anyone what we know about Jesus, as if we could.

God calls us to simply *offer*—through both our words and deeds.

And we offer *faithfully*. "Faithfully" has a double meaning here. It means we do this *consistently*. We persevere. We don't give up. But this also means that we do this trusting God for the process. We realize that unless the Lord speaks through our offering, nothing eternally substantial will occur.

So, *we will faithfully offer to our neighbors near and far.*

Our offer is extended to neighbors *near*. Those with whom we work and attend school, those who live close by, those we see at the stores and on our streets: we offer to them.

And, we offer to our neighbors *far*: those who live in other parts of our cities, in other states, and in other nations. We realize that we are part of a global community and that we have a global responsibility to participate in even "far-away offering."

We don't live as sequestered people.

We intentionally engage with other peoples and nations.

We don't hide from God's call behind man-made borders.

Instead, we embrace John Wesley's idea that "the world is our parish." We have a world-wide message and so we have a world-wide mission.

Our church (we) will faithfully offer to our neighbors near and far four things.

First, we will offer the Word of God.

All of our wisdom and actions on their behalf rise out of the Bible, which we affirm to be the infallible message of God to His creation. We hold Scripture in high esteem and realize our dependency upon it as our living guidebook for life.

So, as opportunity presents, we, without shame, offer Scripture's wisdom and counsel, realizing it is the light that reveals the best life we can live.

We want them to have it too, so we offer the Word of God.

Second, we offer the love of God the Father.

We offer our neighbors the fact that they are loved by the God Who created them and Who wants a relationship with them, just as any healthy father loves and wants relationship with His child.

We offer them God's love by loving them with a love that God supplies to us. We allow His love for others to flow through us.

Our church will faithfully offer, to neighbors near and far, the word of God, the love of the Father, and then *third—the Grace of Jesus, the Son.*

We offer our neighbors the same unmerited, undeserved favor that God has given us through Jesus.

This means, not only will we tell them about Jesus' grace, we will be, ourselves, persons known for mercy, forgiveness, patience and everything else associated with Jesus' grace.

We, both individually and together as a church, will do all we can, short of sin, to show grace to others: both those already in Christ and those yet to know Him.

We will offer the grace of Jesus.

And then (*fourth*), *we will offer neighbors near and far the power of the Holy Spirit.*

The Spirit of God, the one who *leads* and *guides* and *transforms us* wants to *lead* and *guide* and *transform all those around us*. He wants to bring them *healing* and *wholeness* and *peace* and *rest* and *joy*.

All those good things come to us through the power of God's Spirit, and so we offer God's Spirit to our neighbors near and far: to whosoever will receive Jesus, and whosoever will give their life wholly to God and so receive the fullness of His Spirit.

The *vision*, where we're *going*, is a *redeemed world*—a *glorious world*—and a community that reflects Jesus' vision and values.

The *mission*, how we get there, is through this *glorious message*—offered to our neighbors, near and far:

The word of God,

The love of the Father,

The grace of the Son,

And the power of the Holy Spirit.

It is a glorious message we have to offer, because it is all of God. It points to God. It speaks of God and all of His holy and loving character, and it speaks of His deep desire to restore whosoever will.

It is the message of a people who've been called out of the darkness of our sinful world and into His wonderful light.

And we get to share it. We get to offer it to a hurting world.

If they say, "Nah, not for me," we say, "OK for now." And we just keep being their friend and praying for them and showing them Jesus until the day comes when they realize they really do need Jesus—and they'll know they can find Him in us.

We'd all share the news of free \$100 bills. Every one of us would.

So, I ask again, isn't Jesus worth more?

Isn't forgiveness worth more?

Isn't healing and transformation...?

Isn't relationship with God...?

Isn't eternal life...?

Isn't a glorious world more valuable than that?

Our world is literally dying to know Jesus, the Jesus we know.

Whether they receive our message or not, that's up to them.

What's up to us is to work the mission, to offer the glorious message.

Will you do that?

Shall we do that together?

Closing Prayer:

Lord, help us to see – to *really* see – who you’ve made us to be and who You want *everyone* to be. Help us to take *seriously* and *gladly* and *courageously* the glorious mission and message that is ours to live and to tell.

What a *privilege* you’ve offered us!

And what a privilege is *ours* to offer it to *others*!

Holy Spirit, help us live this mission faithfully – with all we are, we pray. Amen.

Closing Song: *We’ve a Story to Tell*, vv. 1, 3, 4.

Benediction:

If you are in Christ – if you’ve received Jesus, then you are a part of a chosen people, a royal priesthood, and a holy nation. We are God’s special possession; we are His own people, and we are receivers of His mercy.

May the Lord help us and then work out our mission – His glorious mission – to share the glorious message that He wants all the world to know this blessing: His glorious vision of redemption.